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INFO RUCNISL/ISLAMIC COLLECTIVE PRIORITY
RUEHJI/AMCONSUL JEDDAH PRIORITY 9584

C O N F I D E N T I A L RIYADH 000894

SIPDIS

DEPARTMENT PLEASE PASS TO DRL FOR EBARKS-RUGGLES AND
JLIEBERMANN, NEA/ARP FOR ABAGWELL

E.O. 12958: DECL: 06/08/2013
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SUBJECT: SAUDIS ON TIP REPORT

REF: SECSTATE 57984

Classified By: Deputy Chief of Mission Michael Gfoeller for Reasons 1,4
(B) and (D)

¶1. (C) SUMMARY. Per Reftel, post delivered demarche regarding the release of the 2008 Trafficking in Persons (TIP) Report to Saudi MFA via diplomatic note on June 4, with a subsequent meeting by Acting Political Counselor with MFA International Organizations Department Deputy Director Abul Aziz al-Wasel on June 8 to follow up on this issue. The Saudis responded with an explanation that most of the issues involving human trafficking in the Kingdom result from Hajj overstayers, not SAG policy or collusion. END SUMMARY.

¶2. (U) The TIP report's conclusion was amicably accepted by Al-Wasel, even though it placed Saudi Arabia in the Tier 3 category - the least favorable. He countered that the SAG does not condone or endorse human trafficking, and that the Kingdom has strict labor laws, claiming what abuses do occur are due to criminal elements, not by the SAG.

¶3. (U) Al-Wasel explained that the vast majority of human trafficking in Saudi Arabia results not from illegal or forced importation of people to Saudi Arabia, but is due to the hundreds of thousands of Hajj overstayers each year (Note: three million Muslims perform the annual Hajj, MOI estimates that each year 10% - 300,000 - overstay and remain in Saudi Arabia to work in any capacity, legal or illegal). Al-Wasel continued that one of the five pillars of Islam is for all Muslims to perform the Hajj - the annual pilgrimage to Mecca - at least once in their life. The SAG, as the responsible entity for Mecca and Medina, Islam's two most holy sites, can not deny entry to Muslims who want to perform their religious duty. The SAG issues entry visas each year to millions who want to make the Hajj pilgrimage, regardless of the fact that the economic situation in their home countries makes these pilgrims quite likely to overstay their Hajj visas to find illegal employment in Saudi Arabia. It is for this reason that he attributes the incidence of human trafficking in Saudi Arabia.

¶4. (C) Al-Wasel asked that this fact be considered in future reports. He cordially concluded by saying that the U.S. and Saudi Arabia share many common interests, especially regarding security and energy, and opined that while the TIP report was unfavorable to the Kingdom, it would not adversely impact our relationship if both nations kept it in the context of our broad bilateral interests.
GFOELLER